

THOUGHTS 8.

ON THE

ABOLITION OF SLAVERY;

HUMBLY SUBMITTED IN A LETTER

TO

The King.

Injustitiæ genera duo sunt ; unum, eorum qui iuferunt ; alterum, eorum qui ab iis quibus inferitur, si possint, non propulsant injuriam.

Meminerimus autem, etiam adversus infimos, justitiam esse servandam ; in quâ virtutis splendor est maximus ; ex quâ viri boni nominantur : Itaque viros fortes et magnanimos, eosdem bonos et simplices, veritatis amicos, minimèque fallaces esse volumus.

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TO THE

KING'S

MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.



SIRE,

MANY, great, and splendid as have been the achievements of British arms, both by sea and land, during the past and present ages,—it may perhaps be affirmed with truth, that our national character has never shone with more distinguished lustre,—that days of more unfading, though undazzling, glory have never irradiated our happy shores, than on the agitation of those two important subjects—the abolition of the slave-trade, and the abolition of slavery: the former has immortalized the memory of our late beloved and revered Monarch, Your Majesty's illustrious Father,—and the latter (if our wishes

should be carried into effect) will stamp the name of George the Fourth on the page of history in imperishable letters of gold.

Justice and Mercy have sounded their trumpets from on high: they summon us to a deed of honor and virtue, and their call is not heard in vain. See men of all ranks, all parties, all denominations, uniting heart and hand to assist in the noble work! not in the hope of gain, but in the expectation of loss; with spontaneous tenders of pecuniary sacrifice (if needful) for the indemnification of the planters, their petitions have been addressed to Parliament from every quarter of the island. Solicitous to strengthen the hands of Your Majesty's Ministers in the prosecution of this wise and generous undertaking, they ardently hope for a vigorous tho' prudent co-operation. *Zeal tempered by caution* is what Your Majesty's Speech recommended: and this is the line of conduct they wish to see adopted, no less from a sense of duty to their Prince, than from a conviction of the excellence of the recommendation. Yet even *caution* would be carried to excess, if it were to trench upon the province of other virtues: a timid policy is often the bane of the most salutary undertakings: and it is sometimes better not to attempt any thing, than to do the work imperfectly.

I will not trespass long on Your Majesty's patience by enlarging on the evils of slavery ; this has been amply done already by abler pens than mine : I would only beg to say a few words in answer to those who consider its abolition as a question of *expediency*, rather than of *right* and *justice* ; and who argue for the continuance of that state of human degradation, on the ground that it has existed in ancient, and does still exist in other modern nations. What then ? are we to take lessons in morality from the corrupt practices of our corrupt fellow creatures ? Why—by this way of reasoning every vice under the sun might be justified. But—say they—Slavery was permitted among the *Jews* : what if it was ? so was polygamy for instance—so were other customs, of which the most strenuous advocates for slavery would not hesitate to disapprove. Surely it behoves “those who profess and call themselves *Christians*,” to adopt *Christian* principles : and let me ask them, what authority does the law of *Christ*, what sanction does the *New Testament* give for slavery—as a civil, a legal institution ? The primitive Christians indeed were enjoined to “submit themselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake ;” and it is doubtless still the duty of slaves to submit to their condition so long as the Government under which

they live shall require it : but at the commencement of Christianity there was no Christian *Government* in existence : if there had been any, is it to be imagined that the Apostles would have recommended to such Government the perpetuation of an establishment so irreconcilable to the Gospel dispensation ? so incongruous to the song of the heavenly host, proclaiming “ Good will toward men ! ” so incompatible with the grand evangelical precepts of *social* duty—such as these : “ All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ”—“ Honor *all* men ; ”—and to the Christian converts, more especially—“ Love as brethren ”—“ And ye masters, do the same things unto *them*, forbearing threatening ; knowing that *your* Master also is in heaven ; neither is there respect of persons with *Him*. ”—“ One is your Master, even Christ. ” &c. &c.

It is not for us to scrutinize the counsels of the Almighty, but to obey His sovereign will, as revealed in Scripture for our instruction ; thence we may derive some little insight into these *arcana* ; there we read that “ God winked at the times of ignorance ; ” and reasons are sometimes assigned for various alterations that were ordained in the order of things. But there we also read—“ Unto whom much is given, of him

shall be much required." Christians stand upon higher ground than their predecessors, and their responsibility is proportionate to the light with which they are favored. And if this is the case with respect to Christendom in general, how imperatively does duty demand of *Britons* to stand foremost in the cause of humanity and justice!—But if any one should here start an objection, that the Apostles did not give any injunction to the Christian proprietors of slaves to grant those slaves enfranchisement, and should put the question—‘may we not hence infer that slavery and Christianity are by no means so repugnant to each other?’—I might answer this by proposing another question—If the Apostles really approved of a state of slavery, why did they not *forbid* their enfranchisement? especially, since by so doing they might have gained great favour and patronage among persons of wealth and consequence, who were the chief owners of slaves: whereas they not only abstained from such prohibition, but St. Paul clearly evinces a decided preference for their freedom in 1 Cor. vii. 21., where he thus advises the slaves themselves:—“But if thou mayest be made free, use it rather:” at the same time pointing out the duty of acquiescence in the lot of servitude, unless they could be exonerated

by fair and lawful means. But in combating this objection, I can employ still stronger argument: I contend, that if the Apostles had recommended to Christians living under heathen Governments the manumission of their slaves, such advice would have been at utter variance with the Gospel precepts—of which I shall quote only a few:—"Lead a quiet and peaceable life"—"Follow peace with all men"—"As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."—Now let us suppose that a small number of Christian masters, living in cities where they were surrounded by heathen neighbours, had granted manumission to their vassals, what would have been the natural, the unavoidable consequence? why discontent and disturbance amongst those that remained in bondage: persecution would have ensued; and Christianity (without some special miracle in its favour) would have been extirpated. Thus would they, who had been commanded by their Divine Master to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," have acted the part of fools, madmen, and incendiaries. If the Apostles then did not lay down such a precept to the slave proprietors, we must assuredly attribute their silence, on that head, not to any approbation of slavery, but to relative, local, circumstantial motives

of prudence and duty. Those were times indeed, when "darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people:" the state of things throughout the world might palliate what is now inexcusable. We may therefore, I think, fairly conclude this objection to be nugatory.

But after all—what comparison, in point of injustice, will the history of a Greek or Roman vassal (generally speaking) bear with that of the African slave? whose unprovoked and long enduring griefs are thus unaffectedly described by a poet, who would not dare to indulge his imagination at the expence of truth:

'Twas night; his babes around him lay at rest,
Their mother slumber'd on their father's breast:
A yell of murder rang around their bed;
They woke—their cottage blaz'd—the victims fled;
Forth sprang the ambush'd ruffians on their prey;
They caught, they bound, they drove them far away;
The white man bought them at the mart of blood;
In pestilential barks they cross'd the flood:
Then were the wretched ones asunder torn,
To distant isles, to separate bondage borne;
Denied, tho' sought with tears, the sad relief
That misery loves,—the fellowship of grief.

The Negro, spoil'd of all that nature gave,
The freeborn man thus shrunk into a slave,
His passive limbs to measur'd tasks confin'd
Obeyed the impulse of another mind;
A silent, secret, terrible controul
That rul'd his sinews, and repress'd his soul.

Not for himself he wak'd at morning light,
 Toil'd the long day, and sought repose at night;
 His rest, his labour, pastime, strength, and health,
 Were only portions of a Master's wealth;
 His love—oh! name not *love*, where Britons doom
 The fruit of love to slavery from the womb.

Thus spurn'd, degraded, trampled, and oppress'd,
 The Negro-exile languish'd in the West;
 With nothing left of life but hated breath,
 And not a hope, except the hope in death
 To fly for ever from the Creole-strand,
 And dwell a freeman in his fathers' land.

Is he not *Man*, tho' knowledge never shed
 Her quickening beams on his neglected head?
 Is he not *Man*, tho' sweet Religion's voice
 Ne'er bade the mourner in his God rejoice?
 Is *he* not man, by sin and suffering tried?
 Is *he* not man, for whom the Saviour died?
 Belie the Negro's *powers*:—In headlong will,
 Christian! *thy* brother thou shalt prove him still;
 Belie his *virtues*:—Since his wrongs began,
 His follies and his crimes have stamp'd him *Man*.

FROM MONTGOMERY'S 'West Indies.'

But to what will not long habit and custom reconcile us? The mental, no less than the bodily eye, in time becomes familiarized to objects of disgust and deformity; and men of honor and probity, are thus sometimes found among the abettors of injustice and oppression. While a solitary instance of unfair and cruel treatment, in this favored land, excites our abhorrence and commiseration, we can reflect

with apathy on the fate of more than seven hundred thousand of our fellow creatures in our *own* islands, who are groaning beneath their load. *Here* a man may obtain redress for an hour's false imprisonment—*there* death alone terminates their bondage; and that not on the ground of offence committed, but of mere possession.—If *civil* and *religious* liberty belong to all, how much more does *personal*? Let it not be said that some measures of *mitigation* can cancel the debt we owe them: suppose a robber had deprived us of a hundred pounds, and should pretend to compromise the business by restoring ten; should we not reject his offer with disdain, and tell him that he might think himself fortunate if he could escape condign punishment by the restitution of the whole sum?

“Who steals my purse, steals trash; 'tis something,
nothing;

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands,
But he that robs me of man's birthright dear—

He makes me poor indeed.

To say a word regarding the iniquity of the *slave trade* would at this day be superfluous, since it is so universally acknowledged; but that infernal hydra will probably never receive its *death-blow*, till slavery itself shall be extinguished; then, and not till then, it will “fall to

rise no more." The position is established, and defies sophistical arguments, that the history of both the one and the other is inscribed with *iniquity* in capitals of jet: for though a price was paid for the slave, to whom was that price paid? Not to the Negro himself, as an equivalent for his loss of liberty; but to the nefarious slave-dealer: it may indeed entitle the purchaser to consideration and recompence,—nay, it gives him an *indisputable* claim; but this bargaining cannot abrogate the immutable and *indefeasible* law of *justice*.

"Errare humanum est." Nations, as well as individuals, may transgress, and our country has participated in the general criminality: but to *persevere*—knowingly, deliberately, and wilfully, in this criminal system is—"treasuring up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath." I maintain that every year, month, week, and day, which shall be unnecessarily added to the continuation of this national injustice, must be an aggravation of our long-standing guilt. Strict justice might indeed demand compensation for *past* wrongs; but all I am contending for, is a *cessation* of injury.

SIRE, as to myself, I am actuated by no interested motive in this address: but it would be uncandid to conceal from Your Majesty, that

the high opinion we gladly entertain of the present Administration, led your loyal subjects to anticipate the adoption of more extended and efficacious measures towards the emancipation of the Negroes, than those which were lately disclosed in Parliament,—and that in consequence of that disclosure, a general feeling of disappointment (though doubtless with many exceptions) has, more or less, pervaded the nation. But tho' disappointed, we are not disheartened,—nor do we despair of the ultimate accomplishment of our wishes; for we regard Your Majesty's Ministers as a constellation, somewhat obscured by a passing cloud, but soon to emerge (we trust) from the transient shade with renovated brightness.

May I now venture to offer a remark or two on the *impolicy* of withholding emancipation,—in addition to those which I have taken the liberty of submitting on the claims of *justice* and *humanity*, with the view of rebutting the objections of the Anti-abolitionists; who, I conceive, might find their true interest rather in advocating, than in deprecating, the change: for on this occasion, that common adage—*Honesty* is the best policy—may prove no despicable aphorism.

It must, I presume, be sufficiently apparent

to every intelligent mind, that in this enlightened age, and in the present critical posture of West Indian affairs, Negro enslavement cannot be of long duration. It may indeed be somewhat protracted by a temporizing, vacillating system; but that system would probably soon be found inefficacious, and would be superseded by the reign of *terror*: what a series of lamentable events may there not be reasonably apprehended during that fearful parenthesis? At length, they would either carry their point *vi et armis*—or, else, we should *concede* to them their freedom, as a dam to stop the torrents of blood that might be flowing on both sides. The question then is reducible to this: Is it better to grant it as a *boon* with all prudent speed, or to have it extorted from us as a *due* after a miserable procrastination? by the former plan we should bind them to gratitude—by the latter we should provoke them to implacable enmity.

The measures that have been resolved on for the improvement and amelioration of the condition of the slaves must be gratifying, considered in themselves, to every person of benevolent feelings; and still more so, if considered as *preparatory steps* to enfranchisement. They may prove highly serviceable in paving the way for this main *desideratum*. But if they should

have the effect of throwing that *desideratum* into the back ground, of inducing us to forget the hopes which—to the credit of Britain—have been awakened in the breasts of our helpless dependants, if they should merely occasion the wished-for event to be postponed to some remote and undetermined period,—then, it is to be apprehended, that such measures might turn out rather a misfortune than a blessing. There are points on which the untutored Negro would reason just as well as the acutest logician. He would think—where is the great kindness in allowing me to *purchase back* my own freedom with the sweat of my brow? Is it not mine by right? Has it not been cruelly ravished from me? Again—as to a distant prospect of manumission—(say 20, 30, 40 years) he would consider thus—what good will that do *me*? I shall then be dropping into my grave, or perhaps already mouldering therein. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick”—and the smiling dawn of West Indian liberty may be succeeded by a gloomy day. The revolutions in St. Domingo have been adduced as an argument against emancipation: but altho’ we may learn from those revolutions what horrible enormities the black and coloured population are capable of perpetrating, when stimulated by rage, revenge,

and despair,—yet they furnish no rational grounds for predicting a similarity of results in our own colonies, where the operation would be conducted with *Zeal tempered by caution*. The disasters that befel St. Domingo, seem to have originated chiefly in the intemperate counsels of the Rulers of France, the revolutionary mania that infatuated all classes and all countries under French domination, and in the the ascendancy which the democratic party obtained—on occasion of any popular commotion—from the powerful support of a numerous *Garde Bourgeoise*, previously organized in almost every town both at home and abroad. The cases therefore are by no means analogous: an imposing military force would probably secure the tranquillity of the islands,—or, even if some disturbances were to take place, they would be insignificant when compared with the frequent insurrections and outrages that might occur in the course of a long and desperate struggle for freedom.

Far be it from me to undervalue the late arrangements for the moral and religious improvement of the Negroes: but let it be remembered, that the human mind—long depraved through ignorance and vice—is a plant of slow growth; and that whatever advan-

tages the regular Clergy may possess over the Missionaries in polite manners and literary education, the latter will not easily be surpassed in assiduity and faithfulness to the duties of their station; and that those very qualifications which would procure to the former access among the higher orders of society, may prove rather an impediment in their progress among the poor trodden-down slaves—of whom, generally, it may be said—

“’Tis not the advice that sways them, but the friend.”

Some benefit may however be reasonably anticipated: I would only intimate that our expectations may be *too* sanguine on this head; and I am persuaded that the assured hope of enfranchisement of some fixed, and not very distant, period,—conjoined to the fear of forfeiting their claim to it,—(which they should understand would be the consequence of gross misconduct) would operate more powerfully on their minds in promoting good behaviour, than all the instructions which the best teachers can impart. I speak here of the black population *en masse*; for such of them as might become true converts to Christianity, would act well from higher motives; and many such there are already in the islands—men who demean themselves in the most exemplary

manner. But what must *they* think of the inconsistency of their superiors, who with one hand dispense to them knowledge and religion, while with the other they keep back from them their little all—their patrimony—the common bounty of Providence?

Do some difficulties present themselves to impede the accomplishment of this great design? not one of them, I conceive, is insurmountable, and to surmount them will enhance the substantial glory of the achievement:

“Virtus repulsæ nescia sordidæ
Intaminatis fulget honoribus.”

As to the ways and means—Your Majesty's patriotic People have signified their readiness to contribute their respective proportions, should occasion require; and their Representatives will not be backward with Parliamentary aid. Let the planter have his *due*, whatever it may be: but that question *probandum est*; it may be much—little—nothing—or less than nothing,—for he may eventually (and perhaps not improbably) be the gainer. A slave is worth to his owner no more than the value of his labour: now if it should appear in the sequel, that a Negro *peasant* may be employed with equal advantage for daily wages as a Negro *slave*,—

and that those wages do not amount to more than the aggregate expences of providing the slave with food, clothing, lodging, &c.,—then, the supposed *due* would be nullified—and the account closed: while the profit (if any) would be all for the planter.

Do the Colonial Assemblies disallow the right of *Parliament* to interfere with their internal concerns? and are they *warranted* in disallowing that right? on this question of polity I leave others to decide. But I would ask, (on the supposition that *Parliament* possesses no right of interference) can it be incompetent for the *Father of his People*, when the salutary measures recommended by the Mother country to her little colonies are contumaciously rejected—can it be an *arbitrary* proceeding—for Him to exercise, in urgent cases, that controul over refractory subjects, which a judicious and affectionate father of a family would not hesitate to use over his own children? who, if he felt it his duty to deprive them of a purchase they had made, would first try the influence of persuasion and remonstrance, before he had recourse to compulsion; and who, even if compulsion were unavoidable, would not think himself justified

in employing it without remunerating them by an equivalent for the privation.

But it is time that I should conclude this intrusion on Your Majesty—which I will do in presuming, with the utmost deference, to sketch the outline of the plan of operation, that appears to me, after mature reflection, most expedient to be adopted. May Your Royal Proclamation be issued, as soon as circumstances shall permit, throughout the British West Indian Colonies—and may the anniversary of this festive day, or of the no less joyful twelfth of August, be selected for the purpose—

O giorno felice à miseri mortali !

announcing that, conformably to the advice of Your Majesty's Privy Council, and to the Resolutions of the Imperial Parliament, it is ordered—that all Negro children born after that day shall be free:—on the same day in the succeeding year, may all children under five, and all persons above sixty-five years of age, be declared free—the ensuing year on the same day, all children under ten, and all persons above sixty—and the year following, all under fifteen, and above fifty-five: may the remaining population between the age of fifteen and fifty-five, obtain their manumission in the course of the next ten years; advancing annually

by regular steps of two years on both sides of the meridian of life; provided always the slaves should not show themselves by their conduct unworthy of this act of beneficence.

I would take the liberty of suggesting, that these measures might *first be recommended* to the Colonial Assemblies,—and the recommendation be accompanied with a pledge of compensation for any contingent loss; but, at the same time, with a positive intimation, that unless such regulations should be carried by *them* into execution on either of the days before mentioned—they would be accomplished on the one next in course, by Royal Proclamation.

Thus, within a period of fifteen years, the work of Negro emancipation would be consummated: and Your Majesty—already distinguished as the Augustus of the age—would be acknowledged as the Cyrus also,—under whose auspices our deep-sunk national stain was resolved to be expunged, and during whose reign I devoutly wish its obliteration may be completely effected.

It would ill become Your Majesty's faithful subjects at home, selfishly to enjoy the comforts of ease, liberty, peace, and plenty—ill would it become them to fall short of the *Pagan* sentiment —“ *Humani nihil a me alienum*

puto:”—They plead the cause of their unoffending and injured fellow men and fellow subjects—some of whom are their Christian brethren: and not for *their* sakes only, but also for their *own*,—remembering those sacred and solemn words—“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these *My* brethren, ye have done it unto *Me*.” Matt. xxv. 40. It is thus also they humbly hope to draw down the blessings of Heaven on their King and Country—and with honest pride to tell the world—

Britannia generous, just, and brave
Henceforth disowns the name of slave.

SIRE—Fiat Justitia!

I beg permission to subscribe myself,
with the most profound respect,

Your Majesty's

most dutiful and

most devoted subject,

INCOGNITUS.

23rd April, 1824.

ERRATA.

Page 5, for *instition*, read *institution*.

— 13, for *sufficienty*, read *sufficiently*.

— 17, for *enfranchisement of*, read *enfranchisement at*.